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Venice: Haut et Court Takes France on Competition Player 'The Accused' (EXCLUSIVE)

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**VARIETY**

Haut et Court, the upscale producer-distributor of Palme d'Or winner "The Class" and company behind TV series smash hit "The Returned," has moved smartly at this year's Venice Festival to acquire French rights to Argentine Gonzalo Tobal's competition contender "Acusada" (The Accused).

Warner Bros. which has rights to Latin America, will release the murder trial thriller in Argentina on Sept. 13.

Deals on Venice competition titles more often close at Toronto. Struck by Vicente Canales' Film Factory Ent., the Venice deal with a prestige distributor in Europe's biggest market for foreign-language movies giveS "Accused" an early tailwind as it segues to Toronto, to screen in its Contemporary World Cinema.

World premiering on the Lido on Tuesday, "The Accused" was described by *Variety*'s Jay Weissberg as "dependably handsome and pleasingly involving, a classic 'did-she-or-didn't-she' murder scenario" [that] mostly focuses on the family dynamics of a young woman accused of stabbing her best friend.

Played by Lali Espósito, a major stadium-packing pop star since she broke out in teen soap "Casi Angeles," the young woman, 21-year-old Dolores, is the only suspect in the murder case, waits two-and-a-half years for a trial, where, as it moves forward, one wrong move or confession could spell her conviction, whether guilty or not.

Co-starring Leonardo Sbaraglia ("Wild Tales," "Felix") and with Gael García-Bernal as a mock-sincere sensationalist TV host milking the trial for all he can get, "The Accused" in many ways marks a move towards the mainstream for Tobal after the more off-beat Cannes Special Screening feature debut "Villegas."

But "The Accused" is no straight-arrow courtroom drama. Though obviously exhausted and – in a human touch – sexually frustrated, Dolores' remains largely inscrutable, which maintains tension to the movie's end. Dolores' obviously seems to feel guilty, but guilty of what? Explanations run from the huge cost of hiring lawyers to reducing her parents' to end-of-their tether nervous wrecks, to really having killed her best friend.

Tobal plants multiple red herrings along the narrative way. But, as much as a crime thriller, "The Accused" is an analysis of a headline-hitting judicial process in a social media age, in a society, Tobal comments in a director's statement, where "facts are being continuously sidetracked and truth, or whatever is left of it, is confused with the speech that provokes the best impression on the viewer."

""I had read the script as a jury member at the Jerusalem Film Lab and was impressed by its strength. The film is a great accomplishment and reveals an amazing talent. It is a powerful drama yet entertaining and tense until the very end. I trust it can reach a large audience and generate a great word of mouth," Haut et Court's Carole Scotta said just after closing the deal at Venice.

"We're extremely glad to know that this great title will have a theatrical release in a key territory like France," added Film Factory Ent. founder Canales, pointing out Haut et Court has shown "wide knowledge releasing and relying on titles with festival careers."

Written by Tobal and Ulises Porra Guardiola, "The Accused" marks a pioneering production collaboration between Rei Cine ("Zama," "Hunting Season," "The Queen of Fear) and K & S Films ("Wild Tales," "The Clan," "El Angel"), the two top-notch Argentine production companies responsible for most of the big art films hitting "A" fests and scoring theatrical releases around the world.

Co-producing are Viacom-owned Telefe, one of Latin America's TV networks most involved in movie production, and forging Mexican production-distribution combo Piano, whose "Time Share" won best screenplay at the Sundance Festival.

"We're delighted to have Haut et Court release the film in such a landmark territory as France. They have been closely following the evolution of this film and we believe they have the perfect combination of strength and sophistication to bring 'The Accused' to French audiences," said Rei Cine's Benjamín Domenech.

K&S Films' Matías Mosteirín commented: "Haut et Court has always been a landmark and a source of inspiration for all of us in K&S Films. He added: "They represent a label and a team that we truly admire. So we couldn't be happier. Announcing this deal right after the incredible reception of the film in Venice is a joyful thing to do."

Dedicated to supporting fast-emerging young filmmakers, Haut et Court has distributed and/or produced films by Cantet, and now Yorgos Lanthimos and Jonas Carpignano, as well as backing established filmmakers such as Naomi Kawase.



CREDIT: REI CINE, K&S FILMS



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